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IS THE HOHENZOLLERN DYNASTY DOOMED ?

BY WILLIAM ROSCOE THAYER

THE German ultimatum of January 31st, with its affront to the United States, and its ill disguised attempt to humiliate us by taking away our independence on the seas, was accepted at its true value by right-minded Americans. Not sufficient attention has been paid to it, however, as a symptom of the state of the German Empire, and especially of the anxiety of the German Kaiser. The resumption of submarine Frigntfulness meant but one thing,—desperation.

Persons on the inside who knew the straits Germany was in believed the act of desperation would not be committed before next May or June; that it was ordered for February first indicates that the German plight was keener than had been supposed. Not that the Germans were actually starving, but that they had reached the point where they felt hungry all the time, and were beginning to understand that, as there was no way to replenish their stores, the approach of real starvation was inevitable and would be more and more rapid. For a people which ordinarily devours more and drinks more than any other, deprivation of food was a grievous ordeal. It must have occurred to the Kaiser and the General Staff that possibly hunger might open the eyes of this docile and abjectly subservient people and that the Almighty must have asked himself, “If they should awaken, what then?” Hunger would accept no excuses. Hunger might not be duped by lies. Other nations, plunged into ruin by arrogant and self-seeking monarchs, had, when their eyes were opened, taken the first opportunity of ridding themselves of those monarchs, either by killing them or by deposing them. England beheaded one Stuart, and drove

another into exile; France repudiated the first Napoleon after Waterloo, and the third Napoleon after Sedan; and Spain ousted Isabella the Second: although none of these sovereigns, not even the great Napoleon, had brought on their respective countries such disasters as Germany has already suffered under William the Second.

Napoleon used to be regarded as unrivalled as a concocter of false despatches and lying bulletins; but he dwindles into insignificance before the fabrications of William the Second. The Kaiser began the War with a lie when he told the Berlin populace that the sword had been forced into his hand, the fact being that for twenty-five years he had made every preparation to draw the sword at a favorable moment and had frequently become so impatient to draw it that he rattled its scabbard ominously. He drew it on August 1, 1914, because he supposed that the enemies whom he expected to make his victims by a quick dash were unprepared. Even in those last days he might have prevented it by a single word to his vassal Austria; but he withheld that word, and when he found that Austria was opening "conversations" with Russia he sent the ultimatum to Russia and the threat to France which assured war within twenty-four hours: and yet he pretended that the sword had been forced into his unwilling hand—and the German people believed him.

The war once begun, he served his subjects with falsified news. For more than two months they were led to believe that he had overwhelmed the French and taken possession of Paris, and even to-day Germans are ignorant of their armies' defeat at the Marne and of their retreat. So when the German troops, obedient to the system of Frightfulness, which had been elaborated in cold blood by the General Staff long before, perpetrated atrocities, hitherto unpractised in modern times by civilized men, the Kaiser saw to it that his Germans should believe that these atrocities were perpetrated on German soldiers by the French and by the Belgians. And this transparent deceit, which an Iroquois Indian would have disdained, was resorted to when each new horror was let loose, and the German people was duly humbugged.

As time went on the Kaiser's scale of falsifying facts reached larger proportions. He told his Teutons and the World, for instance, that the United States had no right to

export munitions to the Allies: and yet for fifty years Prussia has sold munitions to any belligerents in time of war, and sold them impartially, and the Kaiser has presumably enjoyed the extra dividends which this traffic brought to him, as a stockholder in the Krupp Works. His paid agents in the United States worked this dodge so persistently that they succeeded in having a bill introduced into Congress to put an embargo on the exportation of munitions. And yet no one doubts that if American munitions could have been or could now be landed in Germany the Kaiser would have bought as many of them as American dealers could supply.

Next he declared that the British blockade was illegal, because a blockade to be legal must be effective; but in the same breath he protested against the cruelty of the British who by their blockade were starving the innocent noncombatant women and children of Germany. Yet to-day he is justifying the renewal of the submarine Frightfulness on the ground that by it he can quickly starve England into submission and raise the British blockade which has reduced the Fatherland to hunger. "Well," we ask, "how can the British blockade be both ineffective and so devilishly effective at the same time?" But why expect even the consistency of a successful liar from clumsy perjurers who when one false statement fails contradict it by another equally false?

Of all the German transactions with mendacity none has a more comic aspect than that by which they attempted a few months ago to convince their people that the Allies were responsible for the continuation of the war. "We have beaten them," said the Kaiser and his echoes, "and yet they insist upon going on fighting. They are a wicked people not to know when they are beaten. Let the blood of further contest be on their heads! In my desire for peace, in my abhorrence of the inhumanity of war, I graciously condescend to stop now and to grant terms which will leave them shorn of territory, devastated, impoverished and mightily bereaved, and will establish beyond cavil the fact that militarism pays and that there is no punishment for a predatory War-Lord." Such the substance of the Imperial declaration.

Similarly comic was the Kaiser's pronouncement as to the Battle of Jutland when he assured the world that he had won the sublimest naval victory of all time, a victory by

which he became Lord High Admiral of the Atlantic (and probably of other oceans). Now a victory of that kind is easily verified. The victorious fleet not only holds the scene of the conflict, but it passes imperiously and unchallenged over every sea. But the German fleet that fought off Jutland not only did not stay on the scene, but it actually slunk away under cover of darkness to its well-protected base, from which it has taken care not to emerge since, its chief audacity being to send out occasionally in the night or in a fog a cruiser that can quickly run home when she sees an enemy. Such practises revolutionize our conception of a naval victory. Nelson's fleet did not slink away after Trafalgar, nor did Farragut after he crushed the enemy at Mobile Bay; and yet a victory so overpowering as to entitle the Kaiser to the supremacy of the ocean must at least have been as decisive as those of Farragut and of Nelson.

The Kaiser now protests to his Hunnish hearers that the responsibility for war between Germany and the United States must fall on us. Germany, he says, has never wished for war with America. "Why should she?" we ask: "For ever since 1914 she has committed with impunity whatever warlike, or atrocious acts she chose. Her agents conspired at violence here, to terrorize our people. They blew up factories, mines and steamships; they connived at assassination; they organized sedition; on the high seas she destroyed our ships and our citizens without even an apology: and latterly, her submarines have sunk all ships without warning. Her crimes against humanity make respectable the deeds of pirates who sailed under the black flag."

And when at last the United States takes steps to dispose of the German monster, Germany whines that she ought not to be treated in this fashion. A gunman, who shot up a town at pleasure, and insisted that nobody must stop him, could not act more contemptibly, if, when the police surrounded him, he whimpered that it wasn't fair. But the Prussian whimper has always been the counterpart of the Prussian truculence.

It was doubtless as pleasant for the Kaiser to beguile his subjects with such tales, as it is for the victim of paresis to insist that he is sovereign of the world: but as the Arab proverb says, "Falsehoods like chickens come home to roost." And even in Germany, if we may judge by the signs which reach us in spite of the most rigorous censorship, will-

ingness to swallow the Kaiser's assertions is no longer universal. German soldiers who have come back from the front have told their people that the army never entered Paris; and a few civilians, at least, must know that the German fleet instead of sailing triumphantly over the Atlantic, has huddled prudently under cover at its base. The facts in regard to the rest of William's falsifications have also trickled through the dense barrier officially raised against the passage of perilous truth and through the predisposition to accept the Kaiser's utterances as a revelation from Heaven.

How far this has gone we cannot say, but the fact that the truth has penetrated any German minds—as recent utterances in the Reichstag indicate—is of great significance; for it must inevitably spread, and unless the entire German nation is as barbarous as the acts and creed of the Prussian militarists who have misled it, there will be, when the truth is generally understood, a mighty revulsion against the misleaders, the Kaiser first of all. That he has already had an inkling of this possibility appears from the frequency with which he has disavowed his responsibility. "I did not will war," he has proclaimed; but if the war were really the stupendous victory which he has also proclaimed it to be, is it not strange that he evades taking credit for it? Such modesty in him would be unlooked for; assuredly, it is suspicious.

The political revolution in Russia, has given the Kaiser and his Ring terrible anxiety: for although the Slavs at Petrograd who carried that revolution through are, politically, far in advance of the Germans, there is still the possibility, at least, that some Germans may try to imitate them, and so start an avalanche which may bury the Autocrat and his satellites. The deification of the Czar did not save him: what if the "Me and Gott" superstition should fail to save the Kaiser?

From now on the gnawing at the stomachs of sixty-five million Germans—a gnawing that will grow day by day more mordant as the means to appease it lessens—will force the sixty-five million German minds, dependent on those hungry stomachs, to inquire: "What have we been fighting for? Why should we go on fighting?" The seductive dream of world-empire, which they had been taught to cherish, during the twenty years before 1914, was dashed at the Battle of the Marne. The dream which they substituted for it of

an empire extending from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf, seems likewise unattainable. "Why, then, should we go on fighting? All these projects were undertaken to gratify the ambition of the Kaiser, who imagined himself greater than Napoleon, and of the Junkers and militarist oligarchy, who having throttled Prussia, have Prussianized Germany. The Kaiser and his henchmen deceived us by assuring us that the immense costs of this war would not fall upon us but upon the vanquished enemy, from whom crushing indemnities would be wrung; but we see now that there will be no indemnities except those that we may be compelled to pay. The deceivers, these betrayers of Germany, have sacrificed her good name. Only a generation ago, before we were inoculated with the Prussian virus, which like a serpent's sting maddens its victim, we were honored throughout the world: where is our honor now? Our word is despised: we tear up treaties and forswear our pledges; by our system of Frightfulness we have reverted to the level of Huns and have earned the loathing and abhorrence of the civilized world forever. What gain in territory could compensate for this loss of honor or could redeem us from this reversion to the standards of the brute?"

Such poignant questions we can believe that the intrepid Liebknecht, and those who think like him, are already asking themselves, and the number of such questioners must surely increase. We can easily imagine that the princes and the people of the non-Prussian German states also will begin to search their hearts. The King of Bavaria, for instance, may wake up to perceive that he has been wasting his Bavarian treasure and his Bavarian troops in a war for the glory of Prussia and of the House of Hohenzollern. Possibly some Bavarian will recall that complimentary Prussian saying—"A Bavarian is the missing link between monkeys and Austrians." Even if the war had resulted in the winning of world-power, it would be Prussia and the King of Prussia who profited by it; and in proportion as the King of Prussia, under his alias of the German Emperor, became magnified, the King of Bavaria would be reduced to insignificance. And this would be true of the King of Württemberg and the other princes. If the war ends in the defeat of Germany without the destruction of Prussian militarism it is quite within probability that Prussia may annex Bavaria, Saxony, Württemberg, and the other autonomous states, depose their rulers

and abolish their independent governments. This action might serve as a sop for the insatiable ambition of the Hohenzollerns. Nor is the idea fanciful, since Bismarck in 1866 despoiled Hanover and other non-Prussian German states in order to aggrandize Prussia. When such thoughts begin to seethe in the brain of the Bavarian King, he too may ask himself, "What are we Bavarians fighting for?" So long as there was a likelihood that he and his brother princes might receive a share of the world, which the Pan-Germans, inspired from Prussia, preached was to be won in this war, they might think it worth while to engage in the adventure. Paternal and dynastic pride must justifiably swell at the thought that the Bavarian Crown Prince might rule as Proconsul of England, or a Würtemberg as Satrap of New York State, or a Saxon personage as Viceroy of India, and all within a year or two. But General Foch pricked all those bubbles on September 8, 1914.

In nothing have the Hohenzollerns since 1871 been more astute than in persuading the non-Prussian Germans that their welfare, if not their very existence, depended upon the House of Hohenzollern. Military service fostered this creed; so did the educational system, which, from the kindergarten to the highest grades of the University, magnified the person and authority of the Kaiser. The mighty influence and fame of Bismarck, to whom was owing far more than to the King of Prussia himself the creation of the German Empire, with the consequent glorification of the Hohenzollern, helped immensely in this process, because he was regarded as a German national hero long before they were accepted as the national overlords. The school boy of Baden or Saxony or Bavaria was brought up to acknowledge allegiance to the ruler of his special state, but he inevitably recognized a higher allegiance to the German Emperor, who was actually supreme. If the German Emperor decided to make war, the small monarchs had perforce to follow him; because, although there is the pretense of equality in the German Imperial Federation, it is a pretense and nothing more. From 1866, Prussia has taken care to hold the dominant vote and the little princes have taken care, after casting their vote, not to risk extinction by thwarting Prussia.

The question now is whether the loyalty of the Germans to the Hohenzollern monarch will hold in disaster. Now, when the Kaiser has not won, what do non-Prussians

think? They say little or nothing yet,—except a few significant voices in Parliament—because it is still dangerous to speak out; but they must be thinking; and as they enjoy once a fortnight the luxury of an ounce of meat-dripping or a quarter of a sausage, they must be formulating opinions in regard to the Kaiser who has reduced them to this. What are their opinions? Do they begin to suspect that they were duped by those rainbow promises of the Kaiser? Do they ask on what ground the Kaiser and the General Staff asserted that the war would be a very easy enterprise—two or three weeks in which to destroy France and then a month, at the longest, to crush Russia? Do they doubt whether a Warlord who made so colossal, so ruinous, a misestimate of the primary factors in the war, is a leader to be trusted or to be obeyed any further? How must German fathers and mothers feel on learning that when the Kaiser was told at the beginning of the war that it would cost a million lives to hack his way to Paris, he replied cold bloodedly, “Go ahead! We can spare them!” This same Kaiser sacrificed half a million Germans at Verdun in the hope of winning a victory which would give prestige to the degenerate Crown Prince: do the scores of thousands of bereaved families of those soldiers immolated for the dynastic schemes of the Hohenzollerns, regard such slaughter for such a purpose with approval? On one hand, half a million of the best soldiers in Germany, on the other, a weazel-featured Crown Prince.

The stability of the Kaiser obviously depends on his success in hiding from the German people the truth about the war. It seems unlikely that he can keep up much longer his original falsehood that the jealous and wicked enemies of Germany had leagued themselves together against the German nation. For a long time, myriads of Germans have known that this was not true, but of course they have held their tongues. The silly pretense that Belgium was about to invade the Fatherland has also been discarded. So too the charge that England was the aggressor fell foolishly when it was known that at the outbreak of the war she had less than 160,000 soldiers ready for immediate service, and that she required more than a year in order to train and to put into the field a million men. Many Germans are quite aware of these truths now but they go on denying them because they do not dare to disobey orders from above, and because the

official German has been taught to believe that a lie well stuck to is more effective than truth.

But what will happen when the day of disillusionment comes to the German people, when they understand that the war was not thrust upon them by wicked enemies but that their Kaiser and his Militarist Ring engaged in it for selfish and dynastic ends? The Kaiser can hardly go on much longer appeasing them by telling them that they hold Belgium and Northeastern France, Poland, Serbia, and Roumania. Even a docile people will at last inquire why it is that these victories, instead of bringing peace, simply serve to protract the war? Why does each "victory" increase their hunger? The answer is, to quote a common Hindu proverb, that he who holds a tiger by the ears dares not let go; but the Kaiser, of course, would not vouchsafe so true a statement. Nevertheless, the German people must before long begin to suspect the truth, and in their hour of disillusion they may rise in wrath and smash the House of Hohenzollern. That is what other races more advanced in political consciousness and self-respect and less servile in traditions would do. We surmise that that is what the Kaiser himself fears they may do. He is now in a position similar to that of the French Terrorists. He has adopted the atrocious method of unlimited submarine warfare as a last desperate expedient, just as Robespierre, in 1793, resorted to the frightful dispensation of the guillotine which never stopped. Atrocious for atrocity, the Kaiser's is the more abominable, and it may fail him as surely as unlimited guillotining failed to save the Terrorists.

The French, a high-spirited people, accessible to the noblest ideals, but ground down and almost cretinized by the Bourbon régime, rose and ousted the Bourbon king and put him to death; and then, when they found themselves being exterminated by the Terrorists, they rose and guillotined them. The Germans are a very different people, but, sooner or later, they too will feel the irresistible impulse of liberty and will rise against the Hohenzollern dynasty which has deprived them of it, which has seduced them into a terrible war, subjected them to immense hardships and brought them to the brink of ruin. Perhaps the day is at hand when they will repudiate their betrayers.

WILLIAM ROSCOE THAYER.